









A. G. GARDINER

# Essays of To-day and Yesterday

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ESSAYS OF  
TO-DAY AND YESTERDAY

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A. G.  
GARDINER



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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THERE are two Mr Gardiners," said Mr Philip Guedalla in the course of a lecture on "Biographers and their Victims." He went on to explain that there is the Mr Gardiner who has written monumental biographies of George Cadbury and Sir William Harcourt and the Mr Gardiner who is the author of those sprightly books, *Pillars of Society* and *Prophets, Priests, and Kings*. It was not in Mr Guedalla's brief to mention the third Mr Gardiner—the "Alpha of the Plough" who is one of the most delightful essayists of our day. Probably this Mr Gardiner is the most considerable figure of all, for he has a circle of readers whose size might well move most of our popular novelists to envy. The titles of his essays indicate the easy, informal manner in which the author takes his readers into his confidence, telling them how idle or untidy he is. He has the essayist's eye for the significance of things that are apparently of small importance, so he writes entrancingly on pockets or a log fire, on a railway journey or husbands, persuading you for the moment into a belief that these are among the major facts of life. That may, to some extent, account for Mr Gardiner's popularity. He makes the ordinary man feel that he does, after all, count for something in the scheme of things.

Mr Gardiner was born in 1865. For many years he edited the *Daily News*, and the talented band of writers that he gathered round him in those palmy days of

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twenty years ago marks an epoch in the history of British journalism. This in itself would be an achievement considerable enough for most men, but, as we have already indicated, Mr Gardiner has managed to combine the rôles of editor, biographer, publicist, and occasional essayist in a manner that provides a delightful commentary upon his naïve assertion, "I have long laboured under a dark suspicion that I am an idle person."

Thanks are due to Messrs J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., for permission to reprint the essays "On Being Idle," "Chum," and "On Being Tidy," from *Windfalls*; "A Fellow-traveller," "On Pockets and Things," and "The Great God Gun," from *Leaves in the Wind*; "A Log Fire," "On Living for Ever," and "October Days," from *Many Furrows*; and "On Writing an Article," from *Pebbles on the Shore*.

F. H. P.

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## ON BEING IDLE

I HAVE long laboured under a dark suspicion that I am an idle person. It is an entirely private suspicion. If I chance to mention it in conversation, I do not expect to be believed. I announce that I am idle, in fact, to prevent the idea spreading that I am idle. The art of defence is attack. I defend myself by attacking myself, and claim a verdict of not guilty by the candour of my confession of guilt. I disarm you by laying down my arms. "Ah, ah," I expect you to say. "Ah, ah, you an idle person. Well, that is good." And if you do not say it I at least give myself the pleasure of believing that you think it.

This is not, I imagine, an uncommon artifice. Most of us say things about ourselves that we should not like to hear other people say about us. We say them in order that they may not be believed. In the same way some people find satisfaction in foretelling the probability of their early decease. They like to have the assurance that that event is as remote as it is undesirable. They enjoy the luxury of anticipating the sorrow it will inflict on others. We all like to feel we shall be missed. We all like to share the pathos of our own obsequies. I remember a nice old gentleman whose favourite topic was "When I am gone." One day he was telling his young grandson, as the child sat on his knee, what would happen when he was gone, and the young grandson looked up cheerfully and said, "When you are gone, Grandfather, shall I be at the funeral?" It was a devastating question, and it was observed that

afterwards the old gentleman never discussed his latter end with his formidable grandchild. He made it too painfully literal.

And if, after an assurance from me of my congenital idleness, you were to express regret at so unfortunate an affliction I should feel as sad as the old gentleman. I should feel that you were lacking in tact, and I dare say I should take care not to lay myself open again to such *gaucherie*. But in these articles I am happily free from this niggling self-deception. I can speak the plain truth about "Alpha of the Plough" without asking for any consideration for his feelings. I do not care how he suffers. And I say with confidence that he is an idle person. I was never more satisfied of the fact than at this moment. For hours he has been engaged in the agreeable task of dodging his duty to *The Star*.

It began quite early this morning—for you cannot help being about quite early now that the clock has been put forward—or is it back?—for summer-time. He first went up on to the hill behind the cottage, and there at the edge of the beech-woods he lay down on the turf, resolved to write an article *en plein air*, as Corot used to paint his pictures—an article that would simply carry the intoxication of this May morning into Fleet Street, and set that stuffy thoroughfare carolling with larks, and make it green with the green and dappled wonder of the beech-woods. But first of all he had to saturate himself with the sunshine. You cannot give out sunshine until you have taken it in. That, said he, is plain to the meanest understanding. So he took it in. He just lay on his back and looked at the clouds sailing serenely in the blue. They were well worth looking at—large, fat, lazy clouds that drifted along silently

and dreamily, like vast bales of wool being wafted from one star to another. He looked at them "long and long" as Walt Whitman used to say. How that loafer of genius, he said, would have loved to lie and look at those woolly clouds.

And before he had thoroughly examined the clouds he became absorbed in another task. There were the sounds to be considered. You could not have a picture of this May morning without the sounds. So he began enumerating the sounds that came up from the valley and the plain on the wings of the west wind. He had no idea what a lot of sounds one could hear if one gave one's mind to the task seriously. There was the thin whisper of the breeze in the grass on which he lay, the breathings of the woodland behind, the dry flutter of dead leaves from a dwarf beech near by, the boom of a bumble-bee that came blustering past, the song of the meadow pipit rising from the fields below, the shout of the cuckoo sailing up the valley, the clatter of magpies on the hillside, the *spink-spink* of the chaffinch, the whirr of a tractor in a distant field, the crowing of a far-off cock, the bark of a sheep dog, the ring of a hammer reverberating from a remote clearing in the beech woods, the voices of children who were gathering violets and bluebells in the wooded hollow on the other side of the hill. All these and many other things he heard, still lying on his back and looking at the heavenly bales of wool. Their dreaminess affected him; their billowy softness invited to slumber. . . .

When he awoke he decided that it was too late to start an article then. Moreover, the best time to write an article was the afternoon, and the best place was the orchard, sitting under a cherry-tree, with the blossoms

falling at your feet like summer snow, and the bees about you preaching the stern lesson of labour. Yes, he would go to the bees. He would catch something of their fervour, their devotion to duty. They did not lie about on their backs in the sunshine looking at woolly clouds. To them life was real, life was earnest. They were always "up and doing." It was true that there were the drones, impostors who make ten times the buzz of the workers, and would have you believe they do all the work because they make most of the noise. But the example of these lazy fellows he would ignore. Under the cherry-tree he would labour like the honey-bee.

But it happened that as he sat under the cherry-tree the expert came out to look at the hives. She was quite capable of looking at the hives alone, but it seemed a civil thing to lend a hand at looking. So he put on a veil and gloves and went and looked. It is astonishing how time flies when you are looking in beehives. There are so many things to do and see. You always like to find the queen, for example, to make sure that she is there, and to find one bee in thousands, takes time. It took more time than usual this afternoon, for there had been a tragedy in one of the hives. It was a nucleus hive, made up of brood frames from other hives, and provided with a queen of our best breed. But no queen was visible. The frames were turned over industriously without reward. At last, on the floor of the hive, below the frames, her corpse was found. This deepened the mystery. Had the workers, for some obscure reason, rejected her sovereignty and killed her, or had a rival to the throne appeared and given her her quietus? The search was renewed, and at last the

new queen was run to earth in the act of being fed by a couple of her subjects. She had been hatched from a queen cell that had escaped notice when the brood frames were put in and, according to the merciless law of the hive, had slain her senior. All this took time, and before he had finished, the cheerful clatter of tea-things in the orchard announced another interruption of his task.

And to cut a long story short, the article he set out to write in praise of the May morning was not written at all. But perhaps this article about how it was not written will serve instead. It has at least one virtue. It exhales a moral as the rose exhales a perfume.

*From "Windfalls"*

## A FELLOW-TRAVELLER

I DO not know which of us got into the carriage first. Indeed I did not know he was in the carriage at all for some time. It was the last train from London to a Midland town—a stopping train, an infinitely leisurely train, one of those trains which give you an understanding of eternity. It was tolerably full when it started, but as we stopped at the suburban stations the travellers alighted in ones and twos, and by the time we had left the outer ring of London behind I was alone—or, rather, I thought I was alone.

There is a pleasant sense of freedom about being alone in a carriage that is jolting noisily through the night. It is liberty and unrestraint in a very agreeable form. You can do anything you like. You can talk to yourself as loud as you please and no one will hear you. You can have that argument out with Jones and roll him triumphantly in the dust without fear of a counter-stroke. You can stand on your head and no one will see you. You can sing, or dance a two-step, or practise a golf stroke, or play marbles on the floor without let or hindrance. You can open the window or shut it without provoking a protest. You can open both windows or shut both. Indeed, you can go on opening them and shutting them as a sort of festival of freedom. You can have any corner you choose and try all of them in turn. You can lie at full length on the cushions and enjoy the luxury of breaking the regulations and possibly the heart of D.O.R.A. herself. Only D.O.R.A.

will not know that her heart is broken. You have escaped even D.O.R.A.

On this night I did not do any of these things. They did not happen to occur to me. What I did was much more ordinary. When the last of my fellow-passengers had gone I put down my paper, stretched my arms and my legs, stood up and looked out of the window on the calm summer night through which I was journeying, noting the pale reminiscence of day that still lingered in the northern sky; crossed the carriage and looked out of the other window; lit a cigarette, sat down, and began to read again. It was then that I became aware of my fellow-traveller. He came and sat on my nose. . . . He was one of those wingy, nippy, intrepid insects that we call, vaguely, mosquitoes. I flicked him off my nose, and he made a tour of the compartment, investigated its three dimensions, visited each window, fluttered round the light, decided that there was nothing so interesting as that large animal in the corner, came and had a look at my neck.

I flicked him off again. He skipped away, took another jaunt round the compartment, returned, and seated himself impudently on the back of my hand. It is enough, I said: magnanimity has its limits. Twice you have been warned that I am some one in particular, that my august person resents the tickling impertinences of strangers. I assume the black cap. I condemn you to death. Justice demands it, and the court awards it. The counts against you are many. You are a vagrant; you are a public nuisance; you are travelling without a ticket; you have no meat coupon. For these and many other misdemeanours you are about to die. I struck a swift, lethal blow with my right hand. He

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dodged the attack with an insolent ease that humiliated me. My personal vanity was aroused. I lunged at him with my hand, with my paper; I jumped on the seat and pursued him round the lamp; I adopted tactics of feline cunning, waiting till he had alighted, approaching with a horrible stealthiness, striking with a sudden and terrible swiftness.

It was all in vain. He played with me, openly and ostentatiously, like a skilful matador finessing round an infuriated bull. It was obvious that he was enjoying himself, that it was for this that he had disturbed my repose. He wanted a little sport, and what sport like being chased by this huge, lumbering windmill of a creature, who tasted so good and seemed so helpless and so stupid? I began to enter into the spirit of the fellow. He was no longer a mere insect. He was developing into a personality, an intelligence that challenged the possession of this compartment with me on equal terms. I felt my heart warming towards him and the sense of superiority fading. How could I feel superior to a creature who was so manifestly my master in the only competition in which we had ever engaged? Why not be magnanimous again? Magnanimity and mercy were the noblest attributes of man. In the exercise of these high qualities I could recover my prestige. At present I was a ridiculous figure, a thing for laughter and derision. By being merciful I could reassert the moral dignity of man and go back to my corner with honour. I withdraw the sentence of death, I said, returning to my seat. I cannot kill you, but I can reprieve you. I do it.

I took up my paper and he came and sat on it. Foolish fellow, I said, you have delivered yourself into

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my hands. I have but to give this respectable weekly organ of opinion a smack on both covers and you are a corpse, neatly sandwiched between an article on "Peace Traps" and another on "The Modesty of Mr Hughes." But I shall not do it. I have reprieved you, and I will satisfy you that when this large animal says a thing he means it. Moreover, I no longer desire to kill you. Through knowing you better I have come to feel—shall I say?—a sort of affection for you. I fancy that St Francis would have called you "little brother." I cannot go so far as that in Christian charity and civility. But I recognize a more distant relationship. Fortune has made us fellow-travellers on this summer night. I have interested you and you have entertained me. The obligation is mutual and it is founded on the fundamental fact that we are fellow-mortals. The miracle of life is ours in common and its mystery too. I suppose you don't know anything about your journey. I'm not sure that I know much about mine. We are really, when you come to think of it, a good deal alike—just apparitions that are and then are not, coming out of the night into the lighted carriage, fluttering about the lamp for a while and going out into the night again. Perhaps. . . .

"Going on to-night, sir?" said a voice at the window. It was a friendly porter giving me a hint that this was my station. I thanked him and said I must have been dozing. And seizing my hat and stick I went out into the cool summer night. As I closed the door of the compartment I saw my fellow-traveller fluttering round the lamp. . . .

*From "Leaves in the Wind"*

## CHUM

WHEN I turned the key in the door and entered the cottage I missed a familiar sound. It was the *thump, thump, thump*, of a tail on the floor at the foot of the stairs. I turned on the light. Yes, the place was vacant. Chum had gone, and he would not return. I knew that the veterinary must have called, pronounced his case hopeless, and taken him away, and that I should hear no more his "Welcome home!" at midnight. No matter what the labours of the day had been or how profound his sleep, he never failed to give me a cheer with the stump of his tail and to blink his eyes sleepily as I gave him "Good dog" and a pat on the head. Then with a huge sigh of content he would lapse back into slumber, satisfied that the last duty of the day was done, and that all was well with the world for the night. Now he has lapsed into sleep altogether.

I think that instead of going into the beech-woods this morning I will pay my old friend a little tribute at parting. It will ease my mind, and in any case I should find the woods lonely to-day, for it was there that I enjoyed his companionship most. And it was there, I think, that he enjoyed my companionship most also. He was a little particular with whom he went, and I fancy he preferred me to anybody. Children he declined to go with, unless they were accompanied by a responsible grown-up person. It was not that he did not love children. When little Peggy returned after a longish absence his transports of joy knew no bounds. He would leap round and round in wild circles culminating

[illegible]

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His self-pity under pain was ludicrous, and he exploited it as openly as a beggar exploits his sores. You had but to speak sympathetically to him, to show any concern about his affliction, whatever it might chance to be, and he would limp off to the forbidden armchair with the confidence of a convalescent entitled to any good thing that was going. And there he would lie curled up and watchful, his eyes blinking with mingled joy at the unaccustomed luxury and pity for the misfortune that was the source of that joy. He had the qualities of a rather impressionable child. Scold him and he sank into an unspeakable abyss of misery; pat him or only change the tone of your voice and all the world was young and full of singing birds again.

He was, I fear, a snob. He had not that haughty aloofness from his kind, that suggestion of being some one in particular which afflicts the Chow. For him a dog was a dog whatever his pedigree, his coat, his breed, or his colour. But in his relations to the human family he revealed more than a little of the spirit of the flunkey. "A man's a man, for a' that," was not his creed. He discriminated between the people who came to the front door and the people who came to the side door. To the former he was systematically civil; to the latter he was frankly hostile. "The poor in a loomp is bad," was his fixed principle, and anyone carrying a basket, wearing an apron, clothed in a uniform was *ipso facto* suspect. He held, in short, to the servile philosophy of clothes as firmly as any waiter at the Ritz or any footman in Mayfair. Familiarity never altered his convictions. No amount of correction affected his stubborn dislike of postmen. They offended him in many ways. They wore uniforms; they came, nevertheless, to the front

door; they knocked with a challenging violence that revolted his sense of propriety. In the end, the burden of their insults was too much for him. He took a sample out of a postman's pair of trousers. Perhaps that incident was not unconnected with his passing.

One day he limped into the garden, dragging his hind-legs painfully. Whether he had been run over by a motor-car or had fallen back in leaping a stile—he could take a gate with the grace of a swallow—or had had a crack across the back with a pole we never knew. Perhaps the latter, for he had enemies, and I am bound to say deserved to have them, for he was a disobedient fellow, and would go where he was not wanted. But whatever the cause he just wilted away at the hind-quarters, and all the veterinary's art was in vain. The magic word that called him to the revels in his native woods—for he had come to us as a pup from a cottage in the heart of the woodland country—no longer made him tense as a drawn bow. He saw the cows in the paddock without indignation, and left his bone unregarded. He made one or two efforts to follow me up the hill to the woods, but at the corner of the lane turned back, crept into the house, and lay under the table as if desiring only to forget and to be forgotten. Now he is gone, and I am astonished to find how large a place he filled in the circle of my friendships. If the Indian's dream of the happy hunting-ground is true I fancy I shall find Chum there waiting to scour the woods with me as of old.

*From "Windfalls"*

## ON BEING TIDY

ANY careful observer of my habits would know that I am on the eve of an adventure—a holiday, or a bankruptcy, or a fire, or a voluntary liquidation (whatever that may be), or an elopement, or a duel, or a conspiracy, or—in short, of something out of the normal, something romantic or dangerous, pleasurable or painful, interrupting the calm current of my affairs. Being the end of July, he would probably say: That fellow is on the brink of the holiday fever. He has all the symptoms of the epidemic. Observe his negligent, abstracted manner. Notice his slackness about business—how he just comes and looks in and goes out as though he were a visitor paying a call, or a person who had been left a fortune and didn't care twopence what happened. Observe his clothes, how they are burgeoning into unaccustomed gaiety, even levity. Is not his hat set on at just a shade of a sporting angle? Does not his stick twirl with a hint of irresponsible emotions? Is there not the glint of far horizons in his eye? Did you not hear him humming as he came up the stairs? Yes, assuredly the fellow is going for a holiday.

Your suspicions would be confirmed when you found me ransacking my private room and clearing up my desk. The news that I am clearing up my desk has been an annual sensation for years. I remember a colleague of mine once coming in and finding me engaged in that spectacular feat. His face fell with apprehension. His voice faltered. "I hope you are not leaving us," he

said. He, poor fellow, could not think of anything else that could account for so unusual an operation.

For I am one of those people who treat their desks with respect. We do not believe in worrying them about their contents. We do not bully them into disclosing their secrets. We stuff the drawers full of papers and documents, and leave them to mellow and ripen. And when the drawers are full we pile up other papers and documents on either side of us; and the higher the pile gets the more comfortable and cosy we feel. We would not disturb them for worlds. Why should we set our sleeping dogs barking at us when they are willing to go on sleeping if we leave them alone? And consider the show they make. No one coming to see us can fail to be impressed by such piles of documents. They realize how busy we are. They understand that we have no time for idle talk. They see that we have all these papers to dispose of—otherwise, why are they there? They get their business done and go away quickly, and spread the news of what tremendous fellows we are for work. I am told by one who worked with him, that old Lord Strathcona knew the trick quite well, and used it unblushingly. When a visitor was announced he tumbled his papers about in imposing confusion and was discovered breasting the mighty ocean of his labours, his chin resolutely out of the water. But he was a supreme artist in this form of amiable imposture. On one occasion he was entertained at a great public dinner in a provincial city. In the midst of the proceedings a portly flunkey was observed carrying a huge envelope, with seals and trappings, on a salver. For whom was this momentous document intended? Ah, he has paused behind the grand old man with the

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wonderful snowy head. It is for him. The company looks on in respectful silence. Even here this astonishing old man cannot escape the cares of office. As he takes the envelope his neighbour at the table looks at the address. It was in Strathcona's own handwriting!

But we of the rank and file are not dishevelled by artifice, like this great man. It is a natural gift. And do not suppose that our disorder makes us unhappy. We like it. We follow our vocation, as Falstaff says. Some people are born tidy and some are born untidy. We were born untidy, and if good people, taking pity on us, try to make us tidy we get lost. It was so with George Crabbe. He lived in magnificent disorder, papers and books and letters all over the floor, piled on every chair, surging up to the ceiling. Once, in his absence, his niece tidied up for him. When he came back he found himself like a stranger in a strange land. He did not know his way about in this desolation of tidiness, and he promptly restored the familiar disorder, so that he could find things. It sounds absurd, of course, but we people with a genius for untidiness must always seem absurd to the tidy people. They cannot understand that there is a method in our muddle, an order in our disorder, secret paths through the wilderness known only to our feet, that, in short, we are rather like cats whose perceptions become more acute the darker it gets. It is not true that we never find things. We often find things.

And consider the joy of finding things you don't hope to find. You, sir, sitting at your spotless desk, with your ordered and labelled shelves about you, and your files and your letter-racks, and your card indexes and your cross references, and your this, that, and the other—

## ON BEING TIDY

what do you know of the delights of which I speak? You do not come suddenly and ecstatically upon the thing you seek. You do not know the shock of delighted discovery. You do not shout "*Eureka*," and summon your family around you to rejoice in the miracle that has happened. No star swims into your ken out of the void. You cannot be said to find things at all, for you never lose them, and things must be lost before they can be truly found. The father of the Prodigal had to lose his son before he could experience the joy that has become an immortal legend of the world. It is we who lose things, not you, sir, who never find them, who know the Feast of the Fatted Calf.

This is not a plea for untidiness. I am no hot gospeller of disorder. I only seek to make the best of a bad job, and to show that we untidy fellows are not without a case, have our romantic compensations, moments of giddy exaltation unknown to those who are endowed with the pedestrian and profitable virtue of tidiness. That is all. I would have the pedestrian virtue if I could. In other days, before I had given up hope of reforming myself, and when I used to make good resolutions as piously as my neighbours, I had many a spasm of tidiness. I looked with envy on my friend Higginson, who was a miracle of order, could put his hand on anything he wanted in the dark, kept his documents and his files and records like regiments of soldiers obedient to call, knew what he had written on 4th March, 1894, and what he had said on 10th January, 1901, and had a desk that simply perspired with tidiness. And in a spirit of emulation I bought a roll-top desk. I believed that tidiness was a purchasable commodity. You went to a

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furniture-dealer and bought a large roll-top desk, and when it came home the genius of order came home with it. The bigger the desk, the more intricate its devices, the larger was the measure of order bestowed on you. My desk was of the first magnitude. It had an inconceivable wealth of drawers and pigeon-holes. It was a desk of many mansions. And I labelled them all, and gave them all separate jobs to perform.

And then I sat back and looked the future boldly in the face. Now, said I, the victory is won. Chaos and old night are banished. Order reigns in Warsaw. I have but to open a drawer and every secret I seek will leap magically to light. My articles will write themselves, for every reference will come to my call, obedient as Ariel to the bidding of Prospero.

“Approach, my Ariel, come,”

I shall say, and from some remote fastness the obedient spirit will appear with—

“All hail, great master! grave sir, hail! I come  
To answer thy best pleasure; be't to fly,  
To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride  
On the curl'd clouds.”

I shall know where Aunt Jane's letters are, and where my bills are, and my cuttings about this, that, and the other, and my diaries and notebooks, and the time-table and the street guide. I shall never be short of a match or a spare pair of spectacles, or a pencil, or—in short, life will henceforth be an easy amble to old age. For a week it worked like a charm. Then the demon of disorder took possession of the beast. It devoured everything and yielded up nothing. Into its soundless deeps my merchandise sank to oblivion. And I seemed to sink

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with it. It was not a desk, but a tomb. One day I got a man to take it away to a second-hand shop.

Since then I have given up being tidy. I have realized that the quality of order is not purchasable at furniture shops, is not a quality of external things, but an indwelling spirit, a frame of mind, a habit that perhaps may be acquired but cannot be bought. I have a smaller desk with fewer drawers, all of them nicely choked up with the litter of the past. Once a year I have a gaol delivery of the incarcerated. The ghosts come out into the daylight, and I face them unflinching and unafraid. They file past, pointing minatory fingers at me as they go into the wastepaper-basket. They file past now. But I do not care a dump; for to-morrow I shall seek fresh woods and pastures new. To-morrow the ghosts of that old untidy desk will have no terrors for my emancipated spirit.

*From "Windfalls"*

## ON POCKETS AND THINGS

I SUPPOSE most men felt, as I felt, the reasonableness of Mr Justice Bray's remarks the other day on the preference of women for bags instead of pockets. A case was before him in which a woman had gone into a shop, had put down her satchel containing her money and valuables, turned to pick it up a little later, found it had been stolen, and thereupon brought an action against the owners of the shop for the recovery of her losses. The jury were unsympathetic, found that in the circumstances the woman was responsible, and gave a verdict against her.

Of course the jury were men, all of them prejudiced on this subject of pockets. At a guess I should say that there were not fewer than 150 pockets in that jury-box, *and not one satchel*. You, madam, may retort that this is only another instance of the scandal of this man-ridden world. Why were there no women in that jury-box? Why are all the decisions of the courts, from the High Court to the coroner's court, left to the judgment of men? Madam, I share your indignation. I would 'comb out' the jury-box. I would send half the jurymen, if not into the trenches, at least to hoe turnips, and fill their places with a row of women. Women are just as capable as men of forming an opinion about facts, they have at least as much time to spare, and their point of view is as essential to justice. What can there be more ridiculous, for example, than a jury of men sitting for a whole day to decide the question of the cut of a gown without a single woman's expert opinion to guide

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them, or more unjust than to leave an issue between a man and a woman entirely in the hands of men? Yes, certainly, madam, I am with you on the general question.

But when we come to the subject of pockets I am bound to confess that I am with the jury. If I had been on that jury I should have voted with fervour for making the woman responsible for her own loss. If it were possible for women to put their satchels down on counters, or the seats of buses, or any odd place they thought of, and then to make some innocent person responsible because they were stolen, there would be no security for anybody. It would be a travesty of justice—a premium upon recklessness and even fraud. Moreover, people who won't wear pockets deserve to be punished. They ask for trouble and ought not to complain when they get it.

I have never been able to fathom the obduracy of women in this matter of pockets. It is not the only reflection upon their common sense which is implicit in their dress. If we were to pass judgment on the relative intelligence of the sexes by their codes of costume, sanity would pronounce overwhelmingly in favour of men. Imagine a man who buttoned his coat and waistcoat down the back, so that he was dependent on some one else to help dress him in the morning and unfasten him at night, or who relied on such abominations as hooks-and-eyes scattered over unattainable places, in order to keep his garments in position. You cannot imagine such a man. Yet women submit to these incredible tyrannies of fashion without a murmur, and talk about them as though it was the hand of fate upon them. I have a good deal of sympathy with the

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view of a friend of mine who says that no woman ought to have a vote until she has won the enfranchisement of her own buttons.

Or take high-heeled boots. Is there any sight more ludicrous than the spectacle of a woman stumbling along on a pair of high heels, flung out of the perpendicular and painfully struggling to preserve her equilibrium, condemned to take finicking little steps lest she should topple over, all the grace and freedom of movement lost in an ugly acrobatic feat? And when the feet turn in, and the high heels turn over—heavens! I confess I never see high heels without looking for a mindless face, and I rarely look in vain.

But the puzzle about the pockets is that quite sensible women go about in a pocketless condition. I turned to Jane just now—she was sitting by the fire knitting—and asked how many pockets she had when she was fully dressed. “None,” she said. “Pockets haven’t been worn for years and years, but now they are coming in—in an ornamental way.” “In an ornamental way?” said I. “Won’t they carry anything?” “Well, you can trust a handkerchief to them.” “Not a purse?” “Good gracious, no. It would simply ask to be stolen, and if it wasn’t stolen in five minutes it would fall out in ten.” The case was stranger than I had thought. Not to have pockets was bad enough; but to have sham pockets! Think of it! We have been at war for three and a half years, and women are now beginning to wear pockets “in an ornamental way,” not for use, but as a pretty fal-lal, much as they might put on another row of useless buttons to button nothing. And what is the result? Jane (I have full permission to mention her in order to give actuality to this moral discourse) spends

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hours looking for her glasses, for her keys, for the letter that came this morning, for her purse, for her bag, for all that is hers. And we, the devoted members of the family, spend hours in looking for them too, exploring dark corners, probing the interstices of sofas and chairs, rummaging the dishevelled drawers anew, discovering the thing that disappeared so mysteriously last week or last month and that we no longer want, but rarely the article that is the very hub of the immediate wheel of things.

Now I am different. I am pockets all over. I am simply agape with pockets. I am like a pillar-box walking about, waiting for the postman to come and collect things. All told, I carry sixteen pockets—none of them ornamental, every one as practical as a timetable—pockets for letters, for watch, for keys, for handkerchiefs, for tickets, for spectacles (two pairs, long and short distance), for loose money, for note-wallet, for diary and pocket-book—why, bless me, you can hardly mention a thing I haven't a pocket for. And I would not do without one of them, madam—not one. Do I ever lose things? Of course I lose things. I lose them in my pockets. You can't possibly have as many pockets as I have got without losing things in them. But then you have them all the time.

That is the splendid thing about losing your property in your own pockets. It always turns up in the end, and that lady's satchel left on the counter will never turn up. And think of the surprises you get when rummaging in your pockets—the letters you haven't answered, the bills you haven't paid, the odd money that has somehow got into the wrong pocket. When I have nothing else to do I just search my pockets—

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all my pockets, those in the brown suit, and the grey suit, and the serge suit, and my "Sunday best"—there must be fifty pockets in all, and every one of them full of something, of ghosts of engagements I haven't kept, and duties I haven't performed, and friends I have neglected, of pipes that I have mourned as lost, and half-packets of cigarettes that by some miracle I have not smoked, and all the litter of a casual and disorderly life. I would not part with these secrecies for all the satchels in Oxford Street. I am my own book of mysteries. I bulge with mysteries. I can surprise myself at any moment I like by simply exploring my pockets. If I avoid exploring them I know I am not very well. I know I am not in a condition to face the things that I might find there. I just leave them there till I am stronger—not lost, madam, as they would be in your satchel, but just forgotten, comfortably forgotten. Why should one always be disturbing the sleeping dogs in the kennels of one's pockets? Why not let them sleep? Are there not enough troubles in life that one must go seeking them in one's own pockets? And I have a precedent, look you. Did not Napoleon say that if you did not look at your letters for a fortnight you generally found that they had answered themselves?

And may I not in this connection recall the practice of Sir Andrew Clarke, the physician of Mr Gladstone, as recorded in the reminiscences of Mr Henry Holiday? At dinner one night Sir Andrew was observed to be drinking champagne, and was asked why he allowed himself an indulgence which he so rigorously denied to his patients. "Yes," he said, "but you do not understand my case. When I go from here I shall find a pile of fifty or sixty letters awaiting answers." "But will

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champagne help you to answer them?" asked the other. "Not at all," said Sir Andrew, "not at all; but it puts you in the frame of mind in which you don't care a damn whether they are answered or not." I do not offer this story for the imitation of youth, but for the solace of the people like myself who have long reached the years of discretion without becoming discreet, and who like to feel that their weaknesses have been shared by the eminent and the wise.

And, to conclude, the wisdom of the pocket habit is not to be judged by its abuse, but by its obvious convenience and safety. I trust that some energetic woman will be moved to inaugurate a crusade for the redemption of her sex from its pocketless condition. A Society for the Propagation of Pockets Among Women (S.P.P.A.W.) is a real need of the time. It should be a part of the great work of after-the-War reconstruction. It should organize opinion, distribute leaflets and hold meetings, with the mayor in the chair and experts, rich in pockets and the lore of the subject, to light the fire of rebellion throughout the land. Women have won the vote from the tyrant man. Let them win their pockets from the tyrant dressmaker.

*From "Leaves in the Wind"*

## A LOG FIRE

I CAME in from the woods with a settled purpose. I would spend the evening in exalting the beauty of these wonderful November days in the country. The idea presented itself to me not merely as a pleasure, but as a duty. Long enough had November been misjudged and slandered, usually by Cockney poets like Tom Hood, who looked at it through the fogs of a million coal fires. Bare justice demanded that the truth should out, that the world should be told of this beautiful though aged spinster of the months who clothed the landscape in such a radiant garment of sunshine, carpeted the beech-woods with such a glow of gold and russet, filled the hedgerows with the scarlet of the hips and haws, the wine-red of the blackthorn, and the yellow of the guelder rose, and awoke the thrushes from their late summer silence.

This fervour for my lady November is no new passion. There are certain things about which I have never made up my mind, and about which, I suppose, I never shall make up my mind. That is to say I make it up, and then unmake it, after which I remake it, like the child on the seashore who sees his sand castle swept away by one tide, and returns to build it for another tide to sweep away. Thus, if I say that I prefer Bach's *Concerto for Two Violins* to any piece of music I have ever heard, I do not guarantee that a year hence I may not be found swearing by the *Londonderry Air*, or a Hebridean song (the *Island Shielling Song*, for example), or *The Magic Flute*, or something from

Schumann. A year later I may be round to the intertwined loveliness of the two violins again. And if I affirm that *The Brothers Karamazov* is the greatest achievement of the imagination since Shakespeare I do not promise not to say the same thing of something else, *David Copperfield* or *Les Misérables*, when, after a due interval, I express my view again. And so with pictures and authors and towns and trees and flowers—in short, all the things that appeal to the changing emotions or to that vague and unstable thing called taste.

So it is in regard to the merits of the months. I have been trying all my life to come to a final decision on this great question. It seems absurd that one should spend, as I have spent, fifty or sixty years doing little else but sample the months without arriving at a fixed and irrevocable conclusion as to which I like best. But that is the case. I am a mere Don Juan with the months. I go flirting about from one to the other, swearing that each is more beautiful than her rivals. When I am with June it seems absurd that there should be anything else than June, and when I am with August I would not sacrifice August with its waving cornfields and its sound of the reaper for half the calendar. But then comes September, and I chant Swinburne to her as though I had never loved another :

September! all glorious with gold as a king  
 In the radiance of triumph attired,  
 Outlightening the summer, outsweetening the spring,  
 Broods wide on the woodlands with limitless wing,  
 A presence of all men desired.

I do not doubt that I have declared that October, ruddy October, chill October, is the pick of the bunch, and

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I know that on the first bright day in February, when I see the snowdrops peeping out and hear the rooks in the elms, I shall be found declaring that this is the choicest moment of the year. And April—April with the trees bursting into green and the meadows “smo’ered wi’ new grass,” as they say in the dales, and the birds coming up from the South bringing tidings of the summer—well, what can one say of April, Shakespeare’s April, Shakespeare’s “sweet o’ the year,” except that there is none like her?

But I know that when May comes in and the orchards burst into foam, and the lilac, laburnum, and pink hawthorn make every suburban street lyrical with colour and the beech-woods are clothed in that first tender green that seems to make the sunlight sing as it streams through and dapples the golden carpet of last year’s leaves with light and shade, and the bees are humming like an orchestra in the cherry- and damson-trees and the birds are singing as though they are divinely drunk, and the first brood of young swallows are making their trial flights from the nest in the barn and

When nothing that asks for bliss  
Asking aright is denied,  
And half of the world a bridegroom is  
And half the world a bride

—then I know that I shall desert even my lady April and give the palm to the undespoiled splendour of May, singing meanwhile with Francis Thompson :

By Goddés fay, by Goddés fay,  
It is the month, the merry month,  
It is the merry month of May.

In this shameless wandering of the affections I have come round once more to November, and I marvel, as

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I have marvelled many a year before, that the poets have left unsung the elderly beauties of this month, the quietude of its tones, the sombre dignity of its landscape, the sense of a noble passing, the fading colours, the falling leaves, the winds changing to a note of requiem, among the dismantled branches :

Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.

And lamenting this neglect I resolved to pay my tribute. But first I must make up the fire, for though my lady November is beautiful she is austere. She has frozen the pump and the grass is thick with hoar-frost, and to be just to her one must be warm. So I piled on the logs and prepared to be warm and enthusiastic.

Then I did a foolish thing. I sat down in an arm-chair and surrendered myself to the fire's comfortable companionship. There is nothing more friendly or talkative than a fire. Even a coal fire, if you look at it steadfastly, will become as communicative as a maiden aunt. It knows all the gossip of the family, especially the gossip about old, forgotten things. It will talk to you of events so remote that they seem to belong to the country of dreams. It will bring out faded portraits, and sing old songs, and burst into laughter that you have not heard perhaps for forty years, and revive antique jokes, and hand round steaming elderberry wine o' Christmas nights, and make shadowgraphs on the wall as if you were a little boy again, and send you sliding and skating under the glittering stars. It forgets nothing about you, and it tells its memories so cheerfully and serenely that it leaves nothing for tears. All this even a coal fire will do when it is really in the vein and you have time to sit and listen.

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But a wood fire has a magic beyond this. Its very smell is an intoxication as rapturous as romance, compounded of all you have read of the backwoods, of memories of the charcoal-burners, and of Coal Munk Peter, of tales of the woodlands, Tristan and Iseult, and Robin Hood, and Good King Wenceslaus, and the children of the New Forest, of Giles Winterbourne and Marty South, and all the delightful people with whom the mind loves to go a-gipsying far away from this foolish world. Of course, you have to be something of a sentimentalist or a romantic to feel all this—such a person as I once walked with for a month in the Black Forest, to whom the smell of the woodlands was as exciting as wine, and the sight of a charcoal-burner's camp a sort of apocalyptic vision. How well I remember those summer nights when, leaving the forest inn, we would plunge into the woodlands, he singing that haunting air *Der Mai ist gekommen* and interrupting it with a shout as he saw the glimmer of the charcoal-burner's fire through the boles of the pine-trees. . . .

But a wood fire is not only an idyll. It is an occupation. With a coal fire it is different. You put on a shovel of coals, and there's an end of it. But a wood fire will furnish light and pleasing employment for a whole evening. And by a wood fire I do not mean those splinters of wood that you buy in towns, but thumping logs—beech or apple or fir, as the case may be—a yard or two long and with the bark intact that you lay across the fire-dogs and turn round and round until they are burned through at the centre and fall into the embers beneath in a glorious blaze, sending out such a generous warmth as only comes from a wood fire. Once or twice I drew myself away from this seductive task and

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sat down at the table, determined to write such a moving panegyric on November as would make it the haughtiest month of the year. Once I even went outside to get inspiration from the stars and the moon that was flooding the valley with a mystic light and the hoarfrost that lay like a white garment over the orchard. I heard the hoot of the owl in the copse near by and the sound of the wind in the trees and the barking of a distant dog and came back to my task with a stern resolve to see it through. But the struggle was in vain. Always there was some nice readjustment of the logs necessary to call me to the charmed circle of the wood fire; always at the end I found myself planted in the armchair, watching the changing scenery of the glowing embers.

So the article was not written after all. Perhaps it was as well, for I do not think I have the brush to do justice to my lady November. It may be that that is why the wood fire had so easy a triumph.

*From "Many Furrows"*

## ON LIVING FOR EVER

FOR some time past I have noticed on the hoardings of London a placard illustrated with the picture of an American gentleman named Rutherford, who is represented lifting a prophetic fist in the manner of the advertisements of Horatio Bottomley before that prophet of the War had the misfortune to be found out, and declaring that there are "thousands in this city who will never die." I have not had the curiosity to attend his meetings or to inquire into the character of his revelation. I do not know, therefore, whether I am likely to be one of the people whom Mr Rutherford has his eye upon. But the threat which he holds over my head has led me to look the possibility in the face. I suppose Mr Rutherford is satisfied that it is an agreeable possibility. He would not have come all the way from America to tell us about it if he had not thought it was good news that he was bringing.

I think he is mistaken. Judging from my own reactions, as the Americans would say, to his prophecy, I fancy the general feeling would not be one of joy but of terror. If anything could reconcile us to the thought of death it would be the assurance that we should never die. For the pleasure as well as the pathos of life springs from the knowledge of its transitoriness.

All beauteous things for which we live  
By laws of time and space decay.  
But O, the very reason why  
I clasp them is because they die.

All our goings and comings are enriched with the sense

of mortality. All our experiences are coloured by the thought that they may return no more. For us of the significance of the last words of Hamlet and the realm of poetry would become a desert, treeless and songless. It is because "the rest is silence" that the smallest details of our passage through life have in them the power of kindling thoughts such as these:

Sweet Chance, that led my steps abroad,  
Beyond the town, where wild flowers grow—  
A rainbow and a cuckoo's song,  
How rich and great the times are now!  
Know, all ye sleep  
And come, that keep  
On staring that I stand so long  
In grass that's wet from heavy rain—  
A rainbow and a cuckoo's song  
May never come together again;  
May never come  
This side the tomb.

It is not alone the beauty of the sunset that touches us with such poignant emotion; it is because in the passing of the day we see the image of another passing to which we move as unfalteringly as the sun moves into the shadow of the night. When in these autumn days we walk in the woodlands amid the patter of the falling leaves it is the same subtle suggestion that attunes the note of beauty to a minor key. Through the stillness of the forest there echo the strokes of a distant axe felling some kingly beech. For seventy, perhaps a hundred, years it has weathered the storms of life, and now its hour has come and in its falling there is the allegory of ourselves. I think it is that allegory that makes my neighbour so passionately conservative about his trees. They stand too thick about his

grounds, but he will not have the axe laid to one of them.

We cannot go an unusual journey without a dim sense of another journey from which we shall not return, nor say a prolonged good-bye without the faint echo in our minds of ultimate farewells. And who ever left the old house that has sheltered him so long and grown so familiar to sight and touch without feeling some shadow pass across the spirit that is more than the shadow cast by bricks and mortar? Life is crowded with these premonitions and forebodings that make our pleasures richer by reminding us that they are terminable.

And such is the perversity of human nature that if Mr Rutherford should turn out to be well informed, those of us who are marked down for deathlessness would find that the pleasure of life had vanished with its pathos. We should be panic-stricken at the idea of never coming to an end, of never being able to escape from what Chesterfield called "this silly world" and Salisbury "this miserable life." We should yearn for death as the condemned prisoner yearns for life or the icebound whaler for the spring. We do not want to die now, but to be comfortable we want to know that we shall die some day. Being under sentence of death, we cling to life like limpets to a rock, but if we were sentenced to life we should shriek for the promise of death. We should hate the sunset that we were doomed to see for ever and ever, and loathe the autumn that mocked us with its falling leaves.

I remember that in one of her letters Lady Mary Wortley Montagu remarks that she is so happy that she regrets that she cannot live three hundred years.

We all have moments like that, moments when life seems so good that we envy the patriarchs and would be glad if we could abide here longer than nature permits. But in our gayest moments we could not contemplate the prospect of seeing in the New Year of, let us say, A.D. 10024, with the certainty that we were destined to wait on for the New Year of A.D. 100024, and so on to the crack of doom. The mind would reel before such an enormous vista. We should stagger and faint at the prospect of a journey that had no end and of a future as limitless and unthinkable as space. We should look into the darkness and be afraid. There may be an infinite destiny for us to which this life is only a preparatory school. It is not unreasonable to think it is so—that when this fitful fever is over we may pass out into realms and into a state of being in which the muddle of this strange episode will be resolved. But here we are finite. Here we have no abiding city and all our feelings are conditioned by finite terms. We are rather like the batsman at the wicket. He does not want to get out. When he has made his 50 he strives to make his 100, and when he has made his 100 he is just as anxious to make 200. But it is the knowledge that the innings will end, that every ball may be his last, that gives zest to the game. If he knew that he never could get out, that by an inexorable decree he was to be at the wicket for the rest of his days, he would turn round and knock the stumps down in desperation.

No, Mr Rutherford, you have mistaken us. We do not want your revelation. The play is worth seeing, though I wish it were more good-humoured and the players a little more friendly; but we do not wish to

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watch it for ever. We like to know that the curtain will fall and that, a little weary and sleepy, we shall be permitted to go home. We are in no hurry, sir, but we like to know that the curtain is there.

*From "Many Furrows"*

## THE GREAT GOD GUN

A FEW days ago I saw the Advent of the Great God Gun. The goddess Aphrodite, according to ancient mythology, rose out of the foam of the sea, and the Great God Gun, too, emerged from a bath, but it was a bath of fire—fire so white and intense that the eyes were blinded by it as they are blinded by the light of the unclouded sun at midday.

Our presence had been timed for the moment of his coming. We stood in a great chamber higher than a cathedral nave, and with something even less than the dim religious light of a cathedral nave. The exterior of the temple was plain even to ugliness, a tower of high, windowless walls faced with corrugated iron. Within was a maze of immense mysteries, mighty cylinders towering into the gloom above, great pits descending into the gloom below, gigantic cranes showing against the dim skylight, with here and there a Cyclopean figure clad in oily overalls and with a face grimy and perspiring.

The signal was given. Two shadowy figures that appeared in the darkness above one of the cylinders began their incantations. A giant crane towered above them and one saw its mighty claw descend into the orifice of the cylinder as if to drag some Eurydice out of the hell within. Then the word was spoken and somewhere a lever, or perhaps only an electric button, was touched. But at that touch the whole front of the mighty cylinder from top to bottom opened and swung back slowly and majestically, and one stood before a

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pillar of flame forty feet high, pure and white, an infinity of intolerable light, from whence a wave of heat came forth like a living thing. And as the door opened the Cyclops above—strange Dantesque figures now swallowed up in the gloom, now caught in the light of the furnace—set the crane in motion, and through the open door of the cylinder came the god, suspended from the claw of the crane that gripped it like the fingers of a hand.

It emerged slowly like a column of solid light—mystic, wonderful. All night it had stood imprisoned in the cylinder enveloped by that bath of incalculable hotness, and as it came out from the ordeal it was as white as the furnace within. The great hand of the crane bore it forward with a solemn slowness until it paused over the mouth of one of the pits. I had looked into this pit and seen that it was filled nearly to the brim with a slimy liquid. It was a pit of oil—tens of thousands of gallons of high-flash rape oil. It was the second bath of the god.

The monster, the whiteness of his heat now flushing to pink, paused above the pit. Then gravely, under the direction of the iron hand that held him suspended in mid-air, he began to descend into the oil. The breech end of the incandescent column touched the surface of the liquid, and at that touch there leapt out of the mouth of the pit great tongues of flame. As the red pillar sank deeper and deeper in the pit the flames burst up through the muzzle and licked with fury about the ruthless claw as if to tear it to pieces. But it would not let go. Lower and lower sank the god until even his head was submerged and he stood invisible beneath us, robed in his cloak of oil.

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And there we will leave him to toughen and harden as he drinks in the oil hungrily through his burning pores. Soon he will be caught up in the claw of the crane again, lifted out of his bath and lowered into an empty pit near by. And upon him will descend another tube, that has passed through the same trials, and that will fit him as the skin fits the body. And then in due course he will be provided with yet another coat. Round and round him will be wound miles of flattened wire, put on at a tension of unthinkable resistance. And even then there remains his outer garment, his jacket, to swell still further his mighty bulk. After that he will be equipped with his brain—all the wonderful mechanism of breech and cradle—and then one day he will be carried to the huge structure near by, where the Great God Gun, in all his manifestations, from the little mountain ten-pounder to the leviathan fifteen-inch, rests shining and wonderful, to be sent forth with his message of death and destruction.

The savage, we are told, is misguided enough to “bow down to wood and stone.” Poor savage! If we could only take him, with his childlike intelligence, into our temple to see the god that the genius and industry of civilized man has created, a god so vast that a hundred men could not lift him, of such incredible delicacy that his myriad parts are fitted together to the thousandth, the ten-thousandth, and even the hundred-thousandth of an inch, and out of whose throat there issue thunders and lightnings that carry ruin for tens of miles—how ashamed the poor savage would be of his idols of wood and stone! How he would abase himself before the god of the Christian nations!

And what a voracious deity he is! Here in the great

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arsenal of Woolwich one passes through miles and miles of bewildering activities, foundries where the forty-ton hammer falls with the softness of a caress upon the great column of molten metal, and gives it the first crude likeness of the god, where vast converters are sending out flames of an unearthly hue and brightness, or where men clothed in grime and perspiration are swinging about billets of steel that scorch you as they pass from the furnace to the steam-press in which they are stamped like putty into the rough shape of great shells; shops where the roar of thousands of lathes drowns the voice, and where the food of the god is passing through a multitude of preparations more delicate than any known to the kitchens of Lucullus; pools of silence where grave scientific men are at their calculations and their tests, and where mechanics who are the princes of their trade show you delicate instruments gauged to the hundred-thousandth of an inch that are so precious that they will scarcely let you handle them; mysterious chambers where the high explosives are handled and where the shells are filled, where you walk in felt slippers upon padded floors and dare not drop a pin lest you wake an earthquake, and where you see men working (for what pay I know not) with materials more terrible than lightnings, themselves partitioned off from eternity only by the scrupulous observance of the stern laws of this realm of the sleeping Furies.

A great town—a town whose activities alone are equal to all the labour of a city like Leeds—all devoted to the service of the god who lies there, mystic, wonderful, waiting to speak his oracles to men. I see the poor savage growing more and more ashamed of his wood and stone. And this, good savage, is only a

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trifling part of our devotions. All over the land wherever you go you shall find furnaces blazing to his glory, mountains shattered to make his ribs, factories throbbing day and night to feed his gigantic maw and to clothe his servants.

You shall go down to the great rivers and hear a thousand hammers beating their music out of the hulls of mighty ships that are to be the chariots of the god, in which he will go forth to preach his gospel. You shall go down into the bowels of the earth and see half-naked men toiling in the blackness by the dim light of the safety-lamp to win that wonderful food which is the ultimate food of the god, power to forge his frame, power to drive his chariots, power to wing his bolts. You shall go to our temples of learning and the laboratories of our universities and see the miracles of destruction that science, the proudest achievement of man, can wring out of that astonishing mystery coal-tar. You shall go to our ports and watch the ships riding in proudly from the seas with their tributes from afar to the god. And behind all this activity you shall see a nation working day and night to pay for the food of the god, throwing all its accumulated wealth into the furnace to keep the engines going, pawning its future to the uttermost farthing and to the remotest generation.

And wherever the white man dwells, good savage, the same vision awaits you :

. . . where Rhine unto the sea,  
And Thames and Tiber, Seine and Danube run,  
And where great armies glitter in the sun,  
And great kings rule and men are boasted free.

Everywhere the hammers are ringing, the forests are falling, the harvests are being gathered, and men and

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women toil like galley-slaves chained to the oar to build more and more of the image and feed him more lavishly with the food of death. You cannot escape the great traffic of the god though you go to the outposts of the earth. The horses of the Pampas are being rounded up to drag his wagons, the sheep of Australia are being sheared to clothe his slaves, the pine-trees of Lapland are being split for his service, the silence of the Arctic seas is broken by the throbbing of his chariots. As a neutral, good savage, you shall be free to go to Essen and see marvels no less wonderful than these you have seen at Woolwich, and all through Europe from Bremen to the Golden Horn the same infinite toil in the service of the Great God Gun will greet your astonished eyes.

Then, it may be, you will pass to where the god delivers his message; on sea where one word from his mouth sends a thousand men and twenty thousand tons of metal in one huge dust-storm to the skies; on land where over hundreds of miles of battle-front the towns and villages are mounds of rubbish, where the desolate earth is riven and shattered by that treachery stuff you saw being ladled into the shells in the danger rooms at Woolwich or Essen, where the dead lie thick as leaves in autumn, and where in every wood you will come upon the secret shrines of the god. At one light touch of the lever he lifts his head, coughs his mighty guttural speech and sinks back as if convulsed. He has spoken, the earth trembles, the trees about him shudder at the shock. And standing in the observatory you will see far off a great black, billowy mass rise in the clear sky, and you will know that the god has blown another god like unto him into fragments, and that in that mass that

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risers and falls is the wreckage of many a man who has looked his last upon the sun and will never till the home fields again or gladden the eyes of those he has left in some distant land.

And then, to complete your experience, you shall hear from the prophets of the Great God Gun the praises of his gospel, how that gospel is an abiding part of the white man's faith, how it acts as a moral medicine to humanity, purging it of its vices and teaching it the higher virtues (a visit to the music-halls and the Strand at midnight will help your simple mind to realize this), and how the words of the poet, uttered in satire—

That civilization doos git forrad  
Sometimes upon a powder cart—

were in truth the words of eternal wisdom.

I see the poor savage returning sadly to his home and gazing with mingled scorn and humiliation at his futile image of wood and stone. Perhaps another feeling will mingle with his sadness. Perhaps he will be perplexed and puzzled. For he may have heard of another religion that the white man serves, and it may be difficult for his simple mind to reconcile that religion with the gospel of the Great God Gun.

*From "Leaves in the Wind"*

## OCTOBER DAYS

JUST below me on the hillside is a forty-acre field that slopes gently down to the valley. Last year it was ploughed by a motor-tractor: this year I rejoice to say it is being ploughed in the old way, as it has been ploughed for a thousand years. I suppose we ought to be grateful for the motor-tractor and the steam-digger that in cheapening production cheapen our food, but I am glad that the farmer below me has returned to the ancient way. When the machine comes in, the poetry goes out, and though poetry has no place in the farmer's ledger it is pleasant to find that he has sound reasons for reverting to the primitive plough. All the operations of the fields are beautiful to see. They are beautiful in themselves and beautiful in their suggestions of the permanence of things in the midst of which we come and go like the guests of a day. Who can see the gleaners in the field, or the haymakers piling the hay on the hay-wain, or the mower bending over the scythe without the stirring of feelings which the mere beauty of the scene or of the motion do not explain? Indeed the sense of beauty itself is probably only the emanation of the thoughts subtly awakened by the action. It is so with pictures. I do not know any painting that lives in my mind with a more abiding beauty than one of Millet's. It is just a solitary upland field, with a flight of birds and an untended plough lying in the foreground. The barrenness and austerity of the scene are almost forbidding at the first glance, but as the mind dwells on it, it becomes instinct with meaning and emotion.

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Evening has come and darkness is falling over the land. The labourer has left the field and the rooks are going home. In the midst of the ancient solitude and silence that have taken possession of the earth the old plough has the passion of personality. It embodies the epic of man's labour with the intensity that direct statement could not convey, but only the power of suggestion can give.

And so it is with the scene before me. As I watch the ploughman drawing that straight, undulating line in the yellow stubble of the field, he seems to be not so much a mortal as a part of the landscape, that comes and goes as the seasons come and go, or as the sun comes and goes. His father, it may be, ploughed this field before him, and his father before him, and so on back through the centuries to the days when the monks still drank their sack and ate their venison in the monastery below, which is now only a mound of stones. And over the new-ploughed soil the rooks, who have as ancient an ancestry as himself, descend in clouds to forage as they have descended in these late October days for a thousand years. And after the rooks, the starlings. They have gathered in hosts after the pleasant domestic intimacies of summer for their winter campaigning, and stream across the sky in those miraculous mass manoeuvres that affect one like winged and noiseless music. When they swoop down on the upturned soil the farmer blesses them. He forgets the devastations of the summer in the presence of the ruthless war which the mail-clad host is making on the leather-jackets and other pestilent broods that lurk in the soil. They too have their part in the eternal economy of the fields. They are notes in that rhythm of things which

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touches our transitoriness with the hint of immemorial ancestry.

The ploughman has reached the far end of his furrow, and rests his horses while he takes his lunch by the hedgerow. That is aflame once more with the returning splendours of these October days. The green of summer has turned to a passion of gold and scarlet and yellow and purple, and all over the landscape the foliage is drunk with colour. The elms that have stood so long garbed in sober green are showing wonderful tufts and curls of bright yellow at the top, like old gentlemen who are growing old gaily. It is as though they have suddenly become vocal and hilarious and are breaking into song. A few days hence they will be a glory of bright yellow. But that last note of triumph does not belong to October. It is in the first days of November that the elm is at its crowning hour. But the beech is at its best now, and the woodlands that spread up the hillside glow, underfoot and overhead, with the fires of fairyland.

In the bright warm sunshine there is a faint echo of the songs of spring. There are chirrups and chatterings from voices that have been silent for long. There is the *spink-spink* of the chaffinch, and from the meadowland at the back there comes at intervals the song of a lark, not the full song of summer, but no mean imitation of it. It is the robin, however, who is now chorister-in-chief. His voice was lost or unnoticed when the great soloists were abroad, but now he is left to sing the requiem of the year alone—unless we include the owl who comes punctually every evening as the dusk falls to my garden, and utters a few owlish incantations.

I can see the ploughman nearing the top end of the

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field, and can hear the jangle of the harness and his comments to the horses and almost the soft fall of the soil as the furrow is turned over. I think I will bid him *adieu*, for these October days provide tasks for me as well as for the ploughman. There are still some apples to pick, there is an amazing bed of carrots to be got up, there are laurels to be cut down, there are—oh, joy!—bonfires to be lighted, and there are young fir-trees to be transplanted. I think I will start with the bonfires.

*From "Many Furrows"*

## ON WRITING AN ARTICLE

I WAS putting on my boots just now in what the novelists call "a brown study." There was no urgent reason for putting on my boots. I was not going out, and my slippers were much more comfortable. But something had to be done. I wanted a subject for an article. Now if you are accustomed to writing articles for a living you will know that sometimes the difficulty is not writing the article, but choosing a subject. It is not that subjects are few: it is that they are so many. It is not poverty you suffer from, but an embarrassment of riches. You are like Buridan's ass. That wretched creature starved between two bundles of hay, because he could not make up his mind which bundle to turn to first. And in that he was not unlike many human beings. There was an eighteenth-century statesman, for example, who used to find it so difficult to make a choice that he would stand at his door looking up the street and down the street, and finally go inside again, because he couldn't decide whether to go up or down. He would stay indoors all the morning considering whether he should ride out or walk out, and he would spend all the afternoon regretting that he had done neither one nor the other.

I have always had a great deal of sympathy with that personage, for I share his temperamental indecision. I hate making up my mind. If I go into a shop to choose a pair of trousers my infirmity of purpose grows with every new sample that is shown me, and finally I choose the wrong thing in a fit of desperation. If the question

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is a place for a holiday, all the artifices of my family cannot extract from me a decided preference for any place in particular. Bournemouth? Certainly. How jolly that walk along the sands by Poole Harbour to Studland and over the hills to Swanage. But think of the Lake District . . . and North Wales . . . and Devon . . . and Cornwall . . . and . . . I do not so much make decisions as drift into them or fall into them. I am what you might call an Eleventh Hour Man. I take a header just as the clock is about to strike for the last time.

This common failing of indecision is not necessarily due to intellectual laziness. It may be due, as in the case of Goschen, to too clear a vision of all the aspects of a subject. "Goschen," said a famous First Sea Lord, "was the cleverest man we ever had at the Admiralty, and the worst administrator. He saw so many sides to a question that we could never get anything done." A sense of responsibility, too, is a severe check on action. I doubt whether anyone who has dealt with affairs ever made up his mind with more painful questionings than Lord Morley. I have heard him say how burdensome he found the India Office, because day by day he had to make irrevocable decisions. A certain adventurous recklessness is necessary for the man of affairs. Joseph Chamberlain had that quality. Mr Churchill has it to-day. If it is controlled by high motives and a wide vision it is an incomparable gift. If it is a mere passion for having one's own way it is only the gift of the gambler.

But, you ask, what has this to do with putting on my boots? It is a reasonable question. I will tell you. For an hour I had paced my room in my slippers in search of a

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subject. I had looked out of the window over the sunlit valley, watched the smoke of a distant train vanishing towards the west, observed the activities of the rooks in a neighbouring elm. I had pared my nails several times with absent-minded industry, and sharpened every pencil I had on me with elaborate care. But the more I pared my nails and the more I sharpened my pencils the more perplexed I grew as to the theme for an article. Subjects crowded on me, "not single spies, but in battalions." They jostled each other for preference, they clamoured for notice as I have seen the dock-labourers clamouring for a job at the London docks. They held out their hands and cried, "Here am I: take me." And, distracted by their importunities and starving in the midst of plenty, I fished in my pocket for a pencil I had not sharpened. There wasn't one left.

It was at this moment that I remembered my boots. Yes, I would certainly put on my boots. There was nothing like putting on one's boots for helping one to make up one's mind. The act of stooping changed the current of the blood. You saw things in a new light—like the man who looked between his legs at Bolton Abbey, and cried to his friend: "Oh, look this way; it's extraordinary what a fresh view you get." So I fetched my boots and sat down to put them on.

The thing worked like a charm. For in my pre-occupied condition I picked up my right boot first. Then mechanically I put it down and seized the left boot. "Now why," said I, "did I do that?" And then the fact flashed on me that all my life I had been putting on my left boot first. If you had asked me five minutes before which boot I put on first, I should have said that there was no first about it; yet now I found I

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was in the grip of a habit so fixed that the attempt to put on my right boot first affected me like the scraping of a harsh pencil on a slate. The thing couldn't be done. The whole rhythm of habit would be put out of joint. I became interested. How, I wondered, do I put on my jacket? I rose, took it off, found that my right arm slipped automatically into its sleeve, tried the reverse process, discovered that it was as difficult as an unfamiliar gymnastic operation. Why, said I, I am a mere bundle of little habits of which I am unconscious. This thing must be looked into. And then came into my mind that fascinating book of Samuel Butler's on *Life and Habit*. Yes, certainly, here was a subject that would 'go.' I dismissed all the importunate beggars who had been clamouring in my mind, took out a pencil, seized a writing pad, and sat down to write on "The Force of Habit."

And here I am. I have got to the end of my article without reaching my subject. I have looked up and down the street so long that it is time to go indoors.

*From "Pebbles on the Shore"*



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